



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
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IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR DRINKING WATER

Tests Showed Coliform Bacteria in Amherst's Water

The Amherst water system recently violated a drinking water standard. Although this incident was not an emergency, as our customers, you have a right to know what happened and what we did to correct this situation.

We, the Amherst Water Department, routinely monitor for drinking water contaminants. We took 53 samples to test for the presence of coliform bacteria during October. *E. coli* bacteria were detected in one of our samples. Three samples, or 5.5% of our samples, showed the presence of total coliform bacteria. The standard is that no more than 5 percent of samples may test positive for total coliform bacteria each month. All samples that tested positive for *E. coli* bacteria and total coliform bacteria were collected from the northern portion of the Amherst water system.

What should I do?

You do not need to boil your water or take other corrective actions. However, if you have specific health concerns, consult your doctor.

People with severely compromised immune systems, infants, and some elderly may be at increased risk. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. General guidelines on ways to lessen the risk of infection by microbes are available from EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1 (800) 426-4791.

What does this mean?

This was not an emergency. If it had been, you would have been notified immediately. Coliform bacteria are generally not harmful themselves. *Coliforms are bacteria which are naturally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other, potentially-harmful bacteria may be present. Coliforms were found in more samples than allowed and this was a warning of potential problems.*

Usually, coliforms are a sign that there could be a problem with the system's treatment or distribution system (pipes). Whenever we detect coliform bacteria in any sample, we do follow-up testing to see if other bacteria of greater concern, such as *E. coli*, are present. One routine sample tested positive for *E. coli* bacteria. *E. coli* are bacteria whose presence indicates that the water may be contaminated with human or animal wastes. Microbes in these wastes can cause diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches, or other symptoms. They may pose a special health risk for infants, young children, some of the elderly, and people with severely compromised immune systems.

We did not find any *E. coli* bacteria in our repeat testing, and further testing shows that this problem has been resolved.

What happened? What was done?

In October 2010, we collected 44 routine water samples from the distribution system for total coliform bacteria analysis. Three of those samples, collected from the northern portion of Amherst on October 20th, tested positive for total coliform bacteria. *E. coli* bacteria were found in one of those samples. The source(s) of bacteria are not clear.

The Amherst Water Department responded by increasing chlorine levels in the water system. Subsequently, 9 repeat water samples were collected from the distribution system on October 22nd. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection did not issue a Boil Water Order because no *E. coli* bacteria or total coliform bacteria were detected in those repeat samples. In addition, no *E. coli* bacteria or total coliform bacteria were detected in any routine monthly water samples collected from the distribution system since the incident.

We will keep you informed if there are any additional concerns regarding your drinking water. For more information, please contact Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works, at (413) 259-3133 or 586 South Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002.

Please share this information with all the other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, people in apartments, nursing homes, schools, and businesses). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

This notice is being sent to you by
Amherst Water Department

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